

# Are you a happy shopper? Research website helps you find out

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Logo for Howell's Beyond the Purchase website.

Psychologists have found that buying life experiences makes people happier than buying possessions, but who spends more of their spare cash on experiences? New findings published this week in the *Journal of Positive Psychology* reveal extraverts and people who are open to new experiences tend to spend more of their disposable income on experiences, such as concert tickets or a weekend away, rather than hitting the mall for material items.

These habitual "experiential shoppers" reaped long-term benefits from

their spending: They reported greater [life satisfaction](#), according to the study led by San Francisco State University Assistant Professor of Psychology Ryan Howell.

To further investigate how purchasing decisions impact well-being, Howell and colleagues have launched a website where members of the public can take free surveys to find out what kind of shopper they are and how their spending choices affect them. Data collected through the "Beyond the Purchase" website will be used by Howell and other [social psychologists](#). Graduate students in Howell's Personality and Well-being Lab will use the site to study the link between spending motivations and well-being, and how money management influences our financial and purchasing choices.

For his latest study, Howell and colleagues surveyed nearly 10,000 participants, who completed online questionnaires about their [shopping habits](#), personality traits, values and life satisfaction.

"We know that being an 'experience shopper' is linked to greater wellbeing," said Howell, whose 2009 paper on purchasing experiences, published in the Journal of [Positive Psychology](#), challenged the adage that money can't buy happiness. "But we wanted to find out why some people gravitate toward buying experiences."

Participants' personality was measured using the "Big Five" personality traits model, a scale psychologists use to describe how extraverted, neurotic, open, conscientious and agreeable a person is. People who spent most of their [disposable income](#) on experiences scored highly on the "extravert" and "openness to new experience" scales.

"This personality profile makes sense since [life experiences](#) are inherently more social, and they also contain an element of risk," Howell said. "If you try a new experience that you don't like, you can't return it

to the store for a refund."

The authors suggest that it could be easier to change your spending habits than your personality traits. "Even for people who naturally find themselves drawn to material purchases, our results suggest that getting more of a balance between traditional purchases and those that provide you with an experience could lead to greater life satisfaction and wellbeing."

**More information:** Visit the Beyond the Purchase website at [www.beyondthepurchase.org](http://www.beyondthepurchase.org)

"The Preference for Experiences over Possessions: Measurement and Construct Validation of the Experiential Buying Tendency Scale," was published Jan. 23 in the *Journal of Positive Psychology* (Volume 7; Issue 1).

Provided by San Francisco State University

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